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ABSTRACT

Based on the notion that teaching vocabulary extension in isolation makes little impact on students, a three-part exercise, designed to develop students' vocabulary through poetry while providing meaningful enjoyment, uses the poem "The Hawk" by A. C. Benson. In the first class period, students are introduced to both the exercise and the poem and their thoughts and feelings about hawks are tapped through class discussion and a freewriting session. The second class period involves a careful reading of the poem, several at home exercises requiring students to explore the various uses of the word "hawk," and a class discussion. The final session requires students to complete 10 tasks at home that center on specific aspects of the poem, such as the setting, the terror of the bird, and the atmosphere of the moors. A class discussion follows this, and includes making a scrapbook based on the poem. (A list of seven poems for additional reading includes Tennyson's "The Eagle" and Gerard Manley Hopkins's "The Windhover.") (JD)

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Vocabulary Extension through Poetry

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Teaching vocabulary extension in isolation makes little impact on the pupils. But, when vocabulary extension is done in conjunction with other aspects of English, pupils display greater interest and derive meaningful enjoyment from participating.

The following exercise was attempted over three lesson periods with a Std 6 class, though it is also suitable for Std 7.

Poem: The Hawk — A.C. Benson

Introduction

1 Get selected pupils to discuss stories in which innocent people are victims. Tap their *thoughts and feelings*.

2 Let pupils discuss incidents (from real life) where *unfeeling, shrewd/cunning* people have *preyed on the helpless*. Then elicit their responses.

3 Now read the poem aloud to the class. Get a pupil/pupils to read. Discussion.

4 *For free writing*
Imagine you are the little bird. Express as vividly as you can your thoughts and feelings from the time you sensed danger until you were trapped. Now pretend you are the hawk. At last you catch sight of your prey. How do you feel? Discuss your thoughts. What do you do? Why? . . .

Period 2

Pupils study the poem carefully.

Preparation by pupils: (at home)

1 Get one group to gather information on the poet. (For 3 – 4 minutes) (e.g. The *poet*, Arthur Christopher Benson, (1862 – 1925) was an Eton housemaster and later President of Magdalen College, Cambridge. He is chiefly known for his essays).

2 Another group could gather all information on 'the *hawk*' from dictionaries, encyclopaedias etc. Get them to prepare suitable charts — (to be used by pupils during discussion). (e.g. Hawk: is a bird of prey — catches and eats other insects. It is a smaller member of the falcon family esp. the long-tailed, short-winged hunting-falcon).

hawk-eyed: keen-sighted, vigilant.

hawk-nosed: aquiline nose — having a hooked nose.

Verb: To attack like a hawk;
To cry "goods for sale in the street" e.g. hawking fruit (hawker)
To bring phlegm (pron. "flem") up from throat
To carry goods from house to house to sell them).

3 Get one group to draw a hawk (chart paper). Refer to Biology textbook and label the important parts.

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4 Pupils work out the following on the worksheet: (Preparation at home)
Things to do (Specific)

a The hawk is a *bird of prey*. Explain.
b What qualities of a hawk do you find in the poem?
c "The hawk slipt out of the pine".
What does "slip" mean?
What does it mean in the poem?
Now explain the above sentence in your own words.
d What type of day was it? Quote 2 words to prove it.
e Explain "the bird's song sickened and sank".
Then say why.
f What did the little bird do? Why?
g What did she hope for? Prove it. (Quote words)
h "Suddenly down he dropped".
Explain this line in your own words.
To what does "he" refer?
Explain the effectiveness of "dropped". Would the word "fell" be as effective as "dropped". Why?
i What poetic device is used in "she heard the hiss of his wings"?
j "Oh, would she had dared to rest".
To what does "she" refer?
What *feeling* is expressed in this line?
(NB Chart — words dealing with feeling).
k Quote the words which show that the hawk had:
killed the bird;
eaten the bird.
l "And over the heather drifted the down from a bleeding breast".
i What is "heather"? Get details from dictionary etc.
ii Where is it usually found? (Use of atlas)
iii To what does "down" refer? (And what is *quill feather*?)
iv Why is "drifted" a more effective word than "flowed"?
v Whose breast was bleeding? Explain why.
vi How does a hawk kill its prey? Give evidence from the poem.

BUZZ GROUP SESSION USED TO DISCUSS a – l. (Involves greater involvement of pupils and distribution of discussion).

Period 3 (General)

(Pupil preparation at home — discussion in class)

1. Give the *setting* of the poem.
2. Describe the *terror of the bird* in 'The Hawk'.
3. Briefly relate the *story of the poem*. (e.g. While resting on a *pine tree* (cone-bearing evergreen tree valued for timber) a hawk spies his prey — a small bird. The hawk positions himself above her, with his shadow covering her. Sensing danger, the little bird that was singing merrily quietens and attempts cautiously to take cover. But she fails! The hawk attacks accurately, kills and eats her).
4. Describe the *atmosphere* of the *moors*. (Note: stretch of barren land covered

with heather. But a *Moor* was a native of Morocco. And *to moor* means to fasten a ship by an anchor/cable to the shore).
5. What qualities of "*eagleness*" do you find in "*The Hawk*"?
6. *Illustrate* the poem. (Use pictures you have selected)
7. Find out as much as you can about a hawk. (A hawk can carry off poultry, rats, etc; an eagle can kill a lamb.)
8. Find out more about *down* and *quill* feathers. Illustrate.
9. *Heather* is a small evergreen plant with white, purple etc flowers. Try to get pictures of the plant or draw it.
10. Examine the following in the poem: Happiness/Joy; Fear; Anxiety; Desperation — death.

(Note numbers 1 – 10: General questions — allow pupils a week or two to research in the Library before the discussion date.)

For Pupil's Scrapbook: (Only those interested will attempt this)

1. Read the poem again. Picture the hawk's swift and deadly flight. Think of missiles used in modern warfare to track down enemy planes. Collect pictures of these.
2. Collect pictures and accounts of: the hawk; heather; scenes — suggested in the poem; pictures showing birds attacking other birds.
3. Using a series of pictures, illustrate the poem.
4. Note that the term 'hawk' is applied in a general way to all the *diurnal* (what is *nocturnal*?) birds of prey with the exception of *vultures and eagles*. Of the hawk proper, the chief British species include the *goshawk* and the *sparrowhawk*. Hawks have short wings and yellow eyes.

Reading List (Poems)

1. Tennyson: The Eagle
2. The Gay Goshawk: (Anonymous)
3. Robinson Jeffers: Hurt Hawks [in: *One Voice* (Hansen) 1966]
4. George Mackay Brown: The Hawk [in: *Touchstones 3* (Benton) 1969]
5. George Rostrevor Hamilton: Hawk [in: *Touchstones 3* (Benton) 1969]
6. Ted Hughes: Hawk Roosting
7. Gerard Manley Hopkins: The Windhover